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EDITORIAL

ONE OF THE “WEAKNESSES.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

AMONG the “weaknesses” PROF. ELY* discovers in Socialism is the “difficulty in the way of persuading people to adopt it;” and he gives as a proof of this a writer of “considerable capacity” whom “it took several years to understand the programme” of Socialism.

This “weakness” brings out forcibly the soundness of the Socialist principle of the class struggle.

Socialism maintains, and proves the assertion by an uninterrupted series of historic events, that all revolutions have been conflicts between opposing economic interests, between economic classes, and that the class to appeal to on behalf of a revolutionary movement is that whose economic interests are promoted by the revolution.

It requires no stretch of the imagination to realize that the BOURBON slaveholder, however “considerable” his individual “capacity,” would have found it “very difficult to be persuaded to adopt the programme” of the abolitionists; that KING GEORGE, his cousins, his sisters and aunts, however “considerable” their individual “capacity,” would have found it “very difficult to be persuaded to adopt the programme” of the Continental Congress; that KING CHARLES I. and his cavaliers, however “considerable” their individual “capacity,” would have found it “very difficult to be persuaded to adopt the programme” of the Roundheads; that LOUIS XVI. and his nobility, however “considerable” their individual “capacity,” would have found it “very difficult to be persuaded to adopt the programme” of the

* [Richard T. Ely (1854–1943), American academic and author of several books on the labor and socialist movements.]

Constituent Assembly; and so forth and so on.

If it had depended upon the power of these revolutions to “persuade” those whose economic interests stood in the way of persuasion, the BOURBON slave-holder would yet be cracking the whip and using female slaves like mares and cows to breed more slaves with; KING GEORGE and his would still be taxing us at his sweet will; KING CHARLES and his would yet be slitting noses for pastime; LOUIS XVI. and his would yet be enjoying their feudal privileges. It is the hardest thing in the world for a man to contemplate himself with his head cut off; it is no easier job for a class, or a class-conscious individual, to be persuaded into seeing the beauties that would result by his class being dethroned.

If Socialism imagined it could progress by the moral conversion of the capitalist class or of those who are animated by the instincts of capitalism, or if Socialism depended for its success upon its success in converting that gentry, then, indeed, it would suffer of a weakness that was fatal. The fact is, however, that Socialism neither imagines such a thing, nor does it address itself to such a task.

The conversion of capitalists from capitalism is and can be safely left to the capitalists themselves. They themselves will cut one another’s throats fast enough, and at each successive “operation” of the market, when some big shark swallows up the property of ten smaller ones, he converts these, or puts these in condition to be “persuaded” with comparative ease that the Socialist revolution has become a social necessity. Capitalism furnishes the soil, plows the ground, creates the season—the Socialist does but the sowing; the crop will be garnered in the fullness of time.

PROF. ELY’S “weakness” of Socialism only helps to bring out clearly the soundness of the Socialists’ position upon the principle of the class struggle.

Let capitalism furnish us with the proletariat, we shall attend to the rest; and the capitalist who lulls himself in the security that, because HE can’t be “persuaded,” therefore his wage slaves and all those whom he fleeces are equally dull, will some fine morning be roused into an unpleasant consciousness that the “weakness” on which he relied was but a scale before his eyes.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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